

Red China Sets Off 8th Nuclear Bomb

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Communist China yesterday showed the world it is still intent on becoming a leading nuclear power by testing a three megaton H-bomb in the atmosphere.

Informed sources said this eighth Chinese test bomb was dropped from an airplane and exploded high above the earth. This method would tell the Chinese how the device would work as a weapon without filling the atmosphere full of radioactive debris.

The presumption in the Pentagon is that Red China intends to put H-bombs atop missiles. This threat is the Johnson Administration's declared rationale for constructing the Sentinel ABM (anti-ballistic missile) defense around the United States.

[China has refused to join the United States, the Soviet Union and other nations in signing the nuclear test ban treaty forbidding atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons.]

There has been speculation

that Red China's political turmoil was interfering with the nuclear program. Also, China's last nuclear test on Dec. 24, 1967, was read in the West as a dud.

But yesterday's explosion indicates the Chinese nuclear weapons drive is back on the track. The big-bang device — about three times the yield of the H-bombs atop USAF Minuteman ICBMs — may indicate that China, like Russia, is going in for large city-busting weapons.

The Atomic Energy Commission limited itself to this statement on yesterday's test:

"The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission announced today the detection of a Chinese Communist nuclear test, which took place in Lop Nor area at 2:30 a.m. (EST) Dec. 27. This is the eighth Chinese Communist atmospheric nuclear test detected by the U.S. The detonation had a yield of about three megatons, about the same as the sixth Chinese test which took place June 17, 1967."

This latest test may have

been timed to celebrate Mao Tse-tung's 75th birthday Thursday.

It will be a while before Japan and the United States know how advanced yesterday's bomb was. Air samples must be gathered and analyzed to determine the ingredients of the bomb. Chances are it was Uranium-235 with a plutonium trigger.

The three-megaton explosion would have looked brighter than the sun to observers on the ground. The fire ball

To keep the fireball from burning the earth and setting up tremendous drafts on the surface, the Chinese almost certainly detonated the test bomb several miles up in the sky as it floated to earth by parachute.

The AEC would not disclose yesterday how the bomb was dropped. The agency did say that it was "probable" the earlier three-megaton test bomb was dropped from an airplane.

Still shrouded in mystery is how China is coming along on its missile program, although a short-range missile was used

in one nuclear test. The Pentagon has been expecting tests of ICBMs. There is no indication they have yet taken place.

Ralph Lapp, nuclear physicist who has worked on American atomic bombs, theorized in an interview that yesterday's test represented further engineering on the same type of bomb detonated by China back in June 1967.

"I would think they're now in the position to begin production of these nuclear weapons," he said. Lapp said building the rocket for the H-bombs is a lot easier than developing the bombs themselves.

China exploded its first nuclear bomb on Oct. 16, 1964. Its test program has won the admiration of Western scientists for its speed and sophistication. But U.S. defense leaders are troubled by its strictly military orientation.

Embarrassingly for President de Gaulle and his force de frappe, China appears well ahead of France in its nuclear weapons program.